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(54) **Title:** SYSTEMS AND METHODS FOR CONTROLLING AND FORMING POLYMER GELS



200

100 nm
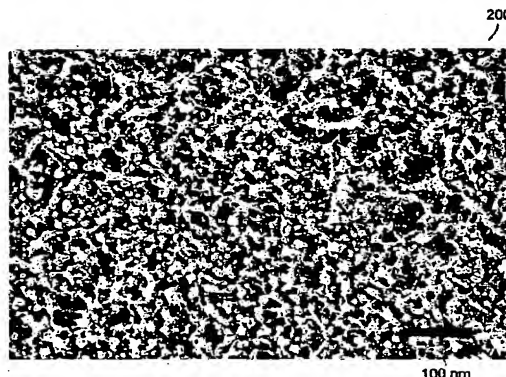
(57) **Abstract:** In preferred embodiments, the present invention provides methods of controllably making a vinyl polymer hydrogel having desired physical properties without chemical cross links or radiation. The gelation process is modulated by controlling, for example, the temperature of a resultant vinyl polymer mixture having a gellant or using active ingredients provided in an inactive gellant complex. In accordance with a preferred embodiment, the method of manufacturing a vinyl polymer hyrodgel includes the steps of providing a vinyl polymer solution comprising a vinyl polymer dissolved in a first solvent; heating the vinyl polymer solution to a temperature elevated above the melting point of the physical associations of the vinyl polymer, mixing the vinyl polymer solution with a gellant, wherein the resulting mixture has a higher Flory interaction parameter than the vinyl polymer solution; inducing gelation of the mixture of vinyl polymer solution and gellant; and controlling the gelation rate to form a viscoelastic solution, wherein workability is maintained for a predetermined period, thereby making a vinyl polymer hydrogel having the desired physical property. In further preferred embodiments, the present invention provides physically crosslinked hydrogels produced by controlled gelation of viscoelastic solution wherein workability is maintained for a predetermined period. In another aspect, the present invention provides kits for use in repairing intervertebral disks or articulated joints including components that form the vinyl polymer hydrogel and a dispenser.

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